

factor which is unrealistically low. HAI's estimate of set costs assumes a coinless phone, but HAI improperly distribute these costs over calls which in very large measure consist of coin calls that would be impossible to complete on a *coinless* set. The set HAI assume would not be economically viable at either the 25 or 8.3 cent per-call compensation rate they claim would be sufficient. Compensation of 34 cents would be required to recover HAI's low-ball estimate of costs. Applying HAI's flawed approach, but making more realistic assumptions about set costs and line costs and an economically plausible capital expense factor, produces an estimate in the 50-55 cent per call range.

MCI and HAI are simply incorrect in their assertion that a competitive market price cannot be used as a benchmark for call compensation. There are, in fact, readily available market transactions to which the Commission can turn for guidance in establishing arrangements for per-call compensation; indeed, these are transactions which the Commission has already itself characterized as embodying "fair compensation." Resort to cost analysis is thus unwarranted and, as we detailed in our previous filing,³ fraught with potential hazards. Were the Commission to base compensation on the HAI prescription, it can be confident of a significant degradation in the quality of payphone service offered to the consuming public.

Relevant Theoretical Framework

HAI begin by citing Baumol and Sidak in support of their contention that the competitive market model is widely accepted as a basis for regulation. Baumol and Sidak are at great pains to argue in favor of the theory of perfect contestability rather than perfect competition as supplying an appropriate theoretical foundation for policymaking in telecommunications. When there are significant fixed costs (or other cost burdens arising from departures from efficient pricing) and/or

³ See John Haring, Charles L. Jackson and Calvin S. Monson, *Economic Report on FCC Resolution of Payphone Regulatory Issues*, July 1, 1996.

significant economies of scale, price equal to marginal cost amounts, in Baumol and Sidak's terms, to "a recipe for bankruptcy."

In our earlier submission we have explained our basis for concluding that the payphone industry is *not* characterized by significant economies of scale.⁴ There are, however, significant fixed costs associated with each payphone implying that minimal recovery of, say, the marginal cost of a call will not recover the firm's costs. When HAI assert (at p. 4) that "The true incremental cost of using payphones to reach interexchange carriers is, of course, essentially zero," they merely betray their disingenuity and willingness to mislead the Commission. That observation is economically irrelevant to the question of suitable compensation in the instant context. Indeed, a principal thrust of Baumol and Sidak's work is to argue that efficient pricing arrangements *must* be based on both demand and supply-side considerations when recovery of fixed costs is required.⁵

Market-based Compensation

HAI (p. 1) contend that, "There is no way to observe directly a competitive market price that can be used as a benchmark for these calls." In reality, it is difficult to see how it could be much *easier* for the Commission to observe competitive market-based rates directly. The competitive market is *already* establishing mutually agreeable terms of compensation for 0+ calls, and the Commission has properly concluded that compensation agreements entered on a voluntary basis fairly compensate. IXC's (presumably including MCI) have struck numerous deals with independent

⁴ Evidence of successful market participation by both small firms and large belies the existence of significant economies of scale in the provision of payphone service. *See* Haring, Jackson and Monson, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

⁵ Thus as we noted in our earlier filing, it would be highly coincidental and unlikely that efficient economic compensation for local and long-distance payphone calls were equal in dollar terms. In our view, the appropriate compensation for local calls is likely to be somewhat lower in dollar terms than that for long-distance calls. *See* Haring, Jackson and Monson, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

payphone providers and with location site providers. HAI has, therefore, erred in concluding that costs must be used as benchmark. Given the *dependence* of efficient rates on *both* conditions of supply *and* demand, the use of cost data to rationalize compensation arrangements is by no means transparent in any event. The Commission is far more likely to establish efficient compensation arrangements by reference to existing *market-based* compensation.

Having incorrectly touted the use of costs for establishing suitable compensation, HAI then cite numerous disabilities associated with analysis of costs. There *are* numerous difficulties associated with analysis of costs, but ironically several of the disabilities alleged by HAI turn out on minimal inspection to be *errors in economic analysis by HAI* rather shortcomings in cost data. In particular, when HAI (p.2) assert that there is problem deriving from use of accounting data because actual costs “should be falling due to generally falling costs of telecommunications equipment,” they again mislead the Commission

The use of legacy equipment to supply service does not constitute economic inefficiency; plainly, it would be highly uneconomic continually to redeploy the latest and greatest equipment, scrapping all existing plant notwithstanding its continued economic viability. The fact that a firm continues to use legacy capital equipment, as all firms necessarily do, does not imply inefficiency in supply and the need for compensation to be discounted to reflect *inefficient* operations. To imply that it does is to mislead on the basis of faulty economic analysis.

HAI argue (p. 1) inaply (given payphone competition) and incorrectly (on a variety of economic grounds) that using a monopolist’s costs as a proxy for a competitive rate introduces a bias towards higher rates. They try to bootstrap this argument into a rationale for exclusion of commission payments to site providers as a cost basis for compensation. Their claim is that commission payments “reflect monopoly rents paid to premises owners” and “that cost-based pricing

properly excludes these *costs*”(emphasis added)⁶ This is an error. First, not all commissions and payments to site providers represent monopoly rents for reasons we discuss presently. But even if they did, payments for location sites still represent *costs*. The fact that productive factors command rents does not make their prices any less costs for firms that wish to purchase them.

Whenever the supply curve or marginal cost of an input rises with increases in the rate of output, inframarginal units earn rents. Rents are ubiquitous throughout the economy. Indeed, MCI itself earns considerable rents. Certainly PCS suppliers would be very chagrined were the Commission to (try to) maintain that subscribers to PCS services should not have to pay prices reflecting the large amounts of money PSC suppliers have bid to acquire spectrum, the magnitude of which is a measure of embodied rents. If there is a problem with monopoly, it should be attacked directly. In the payphone industry itself, this was done years ago when open entry was permitted.

HAI's Cost Benchmark

HAI claim that, “The results of payphone competition do not approximate the results that application of the competitive market model would provide.” They assert that “customers are often unable to use alternatives,” and refer to one of a limited number of special circumstances where supply may be (but even here is not necessarily or always) restricted. The reality is that customers, generally speaking, possess both demand substitutes (temporal and locational demand shifting, cellular, PCS, *etc.*) and supply substitutes as well. There is increasingly ubiquitous competition in the supply of payphone service. Indeed, BellSouth’s payphone revenue market share within its region is less than AT&T’s current share of the long-distance business. Contrary to HAI’s unsupported assertion (at pp. 2-3), individual payphone locations are *not* generally local monopolies. This is not

⁶ See Mary J. Sisak, letter to Regina Keeney, Chief, Common Carrier Bureau (January 11, 1996).

to imply the absence of special circumstances, but the policy that appropriately governs *general* circumstances should not be driven by extraordinary conditions.⁷

The HAI cost analysis is based on a number of questionable assumptions. It is premised on the comparatively low cost of providing a coinless phone indoors. The study upon which the HAI analysis is based examined costs of providing indoor and outdoor coinless and coin payphone services. Indoor coinless payphones represent a relatively small proportion of the payphone base in many operating environments. The average cost for all types of public payphones in the study upon which HAI base their analysis was apparently more than two-and-one-half times as high. The average maintenance cost for all types of public payphones in the study upon which HAI base their analysis was apparently more than five times as high.

The capital expense factor upon which HAI base their analysis appears to be quite low. Assuming a five-year equipment life and an 18 percent annual return implies a capital expense factor of 30 percent. In our view, the latter, while still conservatively premised, would represent a more appropriate capital expense allowance.⁸ This single adjustment increases capital expense in the Hatfield model by *40 percent*.

As previously noted, HAI improperly exclude costs that are appropriately included within a sound economic framework. The fact that an input price might include a rent does not supply an economically coherent basis for exclusion. The presumption that *all* commission payments to premise

⁷ See Haring, Jackson and Monson, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-6.

⁸ At the Commission's recent *Economics of Interconnection Panel Discussion Forum*, Gerald Brock, former Chief of the FCC's Common Carrier Bureau, observed that "in calculating TSLRIC, the idea of using an 11 percent discount rate is all wrong. You're talking a 20-25 percent discount rate. . . . I don't think anyone should sit here today and think that a private firm in competition is going to use an 11 percent discount rate" (pp. 33-34).

owners reflect monopoly rents is ludicrous on its face. First, significant locational rents are, in general, not likely to exist because there is typically effective fungibility across numerous potential sites. Site providers cannot exercise economic power they do not possess. Second, floor space generally has opportunity costs as well as direct costs. Thus the space devoted to a payphone might be occupied by an espresso cart, a vending machine or some other revenue-producing operation. HAI's mischaracterization of payments for space rentals as pure monopoly rent should be seen for what it is: a transparent ploy to reduce compensation for recovery of payphone service providers' legitimate business expenses.

HAI's attempt to rationalize exclusion of various capital and labor costs on grounds that creation and maintenance of certain functionalities are unnecessary to deliver calls to IXC's supplies still another example of faulty economic analysis. Note, first, that the functionalities a phone possesses help determine the opportunity costs associated with use of the phone. Generally speaking, when a functionality that is needed for other applications is tied up when a phone is being used for an access code call, the payphone provider loses the ability to use its equipment to exploit that functionality. Moreover, if an IXC thinks there is a market that would support payphones without the features they do not desire, that IXC is perfectly free to place those phones in the marketplace and in some cases IXCs have done so.

HAI's arithmetic slight-of-hands (at pp. 4-5) constitute a veritable *tour de force*. First, they remark that equipment and installation costs for indoor coinless phones supply a suitable cost base because the extra expense of coin phones and coin phone maintenance is not required to deliver calls to IXCs. Apparently people never place long-distance calls *outdoors*. It is also noted that PPO phones "may contain additional electronics not needed for the simple function of transferring calls to interexchange carriers" and that "these additional costs are not appropriately included in

compensation.” Then HAI calculate an estimate based on a distribution of cost over all of the coin sent paid, 0-/+ calls and an estimate of access code calls placed over the phone. How it is that coin calls can be completed over a *coinless* phone remains obscure. Apparently HAI are willing to exclude the costs of affording certain capabilities when convenient and willing also to include the calls when that is convenient. The only consistency in excluding calls in (calculating) the numerator and including them in the denominator is that it produces an answer more favorable to MCI. MCI is trying to eat its cake and still have it. MCI wants to pay compensation based on stand-alone costs, but it simultaneously wants compensation based on the multiple uses that could occur only with a multiple-use technology.

HAI claim that, at 25 cents per call, local coin sent paid calls could entirely recover their \$423 cost estimate.⁹ The problem for HAI is that local coin sent paid calls could not be completed over the instrument they assume. Moreover, at neither 25 cents per call nor 8.3 cents per call would revenues from the *non-sent paid* calls they consider recover HAI’s cost estimate. *At those rates the payphone HAI assumes would not exist.* The phone would not exist because the stand-alone costs, even though underestimated, would not be recovered, and the phone would, therefore, not be economically viable. Under HAI’s assumptions, 34 cents must be collected on the non-sent paid calls to recover stand-alone costs based upon HAI’s methodology. In our view, this estimate significantly understates required compensation within *their* model because costs are significantly underestimated. More realistic assumptions about set costs and current business line rates,¹⁰ and a more realistic

⁹ We note that this estimate excludes many types of costs that a stand-alone operation would incur. *See Reply Comments of Arthur Andersen*, filed on behalf of the RBOC Payphone Coalition (July 15, 1996).

¹⁰ HAI cite the 1994 *FCC Reference Book* on rates for the \$320 annual cost of a single
(continued...)

(although still conservative) capital expense factor would *alone* be sufficient to put stand-alone-based compensation in the *50-55 cent range* within this framework and on these assumptions.

The HAI study rests on a basic misconception: it treats payphone service as a regulated public utility. That is neither the actual industry organization nor obviously the one contemplated by the 1996 Telecommunications Act. This misconception leads to mistaken policy prescriptions when it comes to appropriate compensation arrangements. HAI's approach is to calculate the compensation per call that would allegedly recover the cost of a given population of payphones (*viz., e.g.,* the Nynex payphones in New Hampshire). But in the new world created by the Act, there are no rules (apart from provisions governing the future supply of public interest payphones) that will operate to keep unprofitable telephones in place. Under virtually any plausible distribution of payphone usage, at least half of all payphones are used less than average. This means that, if HAI's approach to compensation were implemented, *more than half of all payphones would receive compensation less than the costs they set out to recover.*

The Act requires subsidy-free operations. Payphone providers will possess little incentive to maintain phones in unprofitable locations. Indeed, the firm with the unprofitable low-usage phone in a rural location may not be operating the heavily-used phones in urban settings, and thus not be in a position to offset losses in any event. With free entry the number of phones in profitable locations will proliferate thereby lowering returns to offset any losses. HAI's analysis, which purports to calculate the average cost of a payphone call, fails to consider the problem of keeping payphones with below-average usage economically viable. Most payphones do not have higher than average usage.

¹⁰ (...continued)

business line. The FCC's November 1995 *Reference Book on Rates* (McMaster and Lande, 1995), p. 28, gives the average bill for "representative" single-line service as \$41.74 per month — equivalent to an annual charge of \$497.64. This is \$177.36 higher than the number HAI used.

Conclusion

HAI claim (p. 4) that “Allowing PPOs to recover more than their actual costs results in excessive monopoly profits.” Leaving aside the fact that payphone service providers are not monopolists (If MCI earns more than its actual costs, does this imply that the result is excessive monopoly profit?), it should be noted that economic analysis does not, in fact, predict monopoly profits if compensation is set at high levels. Given the manifest freedom of resources to migrate into this business activity, the result of compensation that produced high levels of profitability would be rapid expansion of payphone capacity. The airline industry under regulation supplies an apposite parallel. Government efforts historically to increase airline profitability by allowing fare increases were never successful. The reason was simple — competitive rivalry among regulated air carriers always dissipated any supernormal profits. The “ratchet effect” under airline regulation produced lower airplane load factors (resulting from capacity expansion and an increase in the number of scheduled flights) and ever more elaborate in-flight service as the consequence of government fare setting.¹¹

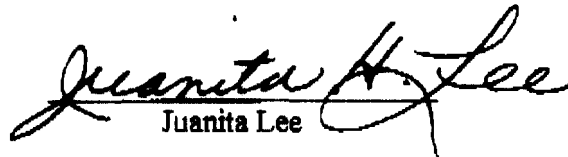
MCI’s claim, in essence, is that while HAI’s may be a thoroughly flawed cost study, it is the only cost study and, therefore, the Commission has no recourse but to rely on it.¹² The Commission does not, in fact, need to rely on any cost study, and indeed should avoid resort to cost analysis given the pitfalls associated therewith — disabilities more than amply demonstrated by HAI’s faulty analysis. The Commission would be well advised to rely on readily available information on market-based transactions for establishing suitable compensation arrangements.

¹¹ See George W. Douglas and James E. Miller III, *Economic Regulation of Domestic Air Transportation* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1974); and George C. Eads, “Competition in the Domestic Trunk Airline Industry,” in A. Phillips, ed., *Promoting Competition in Regulated Markets* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1975), pp. 16-39.

¹² See Sisak, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that I have this 15th day of July, 1996 served all parties to this action with a copy of the foregoing **REPLY COMMENTS** by placing a true and correct copy of the same in the United States Mail, postage prepaid, addressed to the parties on the attached service list.


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